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GARBAGE MAN

story & photography by justin coyne

Outside the workshop an impact wrench clatters against cooler sounds—the gurgling pond, birds fluttering through the brush, wind in the trees overhead. All the creatures hold their breath; they stand sentry over walkways cut through piles of engines and lawnmower bodies. The orange cat stands upright. The shovelhead dog sits poised on bowed legs.

The old robot bares its brass teeth.

Walt Binggeli is in his shop, wishing he had time to people his land with more creatures. Instead, he wheels a push mower onto his workbench, flips it on its side, and for the millionth time, he sets to taking things apart so he can put them all back together again.

The land is small—1.7 acres small—and so is the town that Walt and his wife, Marie, have built on it. The buildings are packed together, their narrow alleys blocked by mannequins and bleached old wagons. The sheriff's office is no more than 12 feet wide. The general store, with its second floor doctor's office, is also slightly shrunken. The train station, blacksmith's shop, post office, firehouse, saloon—all of it is impossibly small, but still big enough to walk and scavenge through. From the silvered gate to the pile of boards where the church once stood, Wagon Town is still big enough to get lost in.

Only Walt and Marie know every twist and turn through the rotting walls and alder saplings. Perhaps Walt alone knows all the contents, every antique trinket and broken crankcase. He needs these parts, when he gets the time. They are the materials he needs to bring his creatures to life.

Walt is an artist. Just ask the local collectors who know him, the patrons flung across 30 years and 3000 miles, the New York company that bought a single metal bird and asked for 1000 more.

Ask Walt, and he'll tell you he fixes lawnmowers. In his spare time, he goofos around with gas tanks and spoons and dismantled appliances, and he comes up with these—his Goofies. They are simple collections of the parts he puts into them, but they are all distinct and alive and eerily fantastic. They are birds and dogs and cats, robots and machines and strange, invented insects. They are what Walt sees when he looks into the piles of old junk that surrounds him as he works. Call them art. Call them craft. For Walt, they are something to busy his hands and mind. He is a man who needs to keep moving. Even at 78, he sets tirelessly to work.

Marie is short, like Walt, but she ambles through the scrap heaps in a much different way. Head down, hat cocked to the side, body zipped





into faded green coveralls, Walt walks from one end of the property to the other as if he is always running late. There is work to be done; there are parts to be unearthed, and always, there is something to keep him busy.

Marie's walk is slow and swaggering, her job less immediate. She hauls cardboard boxes and yellowed newspapers from the house down into Wagon Town. They'll be moving soon, though they don't know when. Until they do know, Marie takes her time, shuffling through the weeds and gravel to where her son and granddaughter wait to help.

"Here are some boxes," she says, and she and her granddaughter Lynette lay the boxes on an old flatbed wagon, folding them open and taping them together.

Lynette is carting antiques up a hard, mud path from the general store. Her godfather, Henry, cut a hole in the back wall. He hands the objects through the hole, plucking them first from shattered display cases. When Walt and Marie leave this place, he'll have to leave too. Wagon Town's antique shop has been converted into the apartment where he has lived for the past three years.

Henry is a cautious man. He is constantly surveying, giving equal thought to everything he says and does. At the day's end he leaves the general store, slipping through a door and into the antique shop across the street. There he sits behind an ancient computer with a cup of coffee in one hand, and a cigarette in the other. His eyes, open wide, peer out from sharp temple—he pauses for long stretches, letting his words settle in.

"Walt is a collector ... " He blinks and squints, reconsidering. "Or an acquirer. I am too. I acquired stuff here," His hand flutters off, motioning in every direction that 1.7 acres can sprawl. "Piles of lumber and whatever stuff I get. What I don't build, I acquire."

He sets his coffee down, puts his hands behind his head. He's thinking about the sculptures now, about the creatures built from products acquired.

"Inspiration is to look at something and see different things in it. Like taking the ink blot test—what do you see? Different people see different things."

And Walt is a person who sees things differently?

"I don't think he thinks anything about the philosophies. I think he just does. He just creates." Henry says, shaking his head resolutely. "I'm the philosopher of the family."

At the north end of Wagon Town, a short bridge crosses to a handful of mobile homes. The first is where Walt and Marie's other son, Henry's half-brother Larry, has lived with his family for the last 15 years.

Larry is a large man, dwarfing his parents even with his shoulders slumped, and his head hanging listlessly. Larry is a tired man. He retired by the time he was 50, worn by Bering Sea storms and workdays stretching 100 hours a shot. Now he lolls around the repair shop, setting Walt for coffee breaks and making sure his father takes time to rest and free his hands.

"I told him if he doesn't quit working, we're gonna have to fix up

his work benches to where he can roll up to them in a wheelchair," Larry says, sitting on his front porch, pointing with an upturned palm across Wagon Town to his father's shop. "If he had the time—and probably the materials—I think he could make a good living selling these sculptures.

"I know when that gal came back from New York—when she brought his stuff back—she had an outfit back there that wanted him to... Well, they had orders for birds almost like this one here," He points at a red headed bird bolted to his porch, smiling through a pruning shear beak, balancing its shovel-head body on legs of re-bar. "For like, a thousand of them. The contract was there for him to sign. He just didn't want to get into that. He would have lost his ... his style, I guess."

Walt's style surrounds Larry, spilling across the creek from Wagon Town, expanding in mounds of parts and discarded machines. In the workshop, his style hangs from the rafters and hides in the underbrush. In the barrage of forsaken objects, teakettle faces and re-bar talons are scattered everywhere—little traces of Walt's personal style.

"He had some beautiful things that are gone—somebody's bought them up," Larry says, punching the word beautiful as if it is difficult for him to say. "He has some really nice works of art."

If Walt sees beauty in his sculptures, he does not say so. He appraises them without names, listing off the collection of parts he used to build them.

"The body of the cart is made out of a gas tank," Walt says in his muffled voice, as he motions to a horse and cart built on roughly the same scale as Wagon Town. "The wheels are old wheelbarrow wheels. The horse's head is a motorcycle gas tank. The ears are spades, you know, garden spades." He raps his knuckles on the horse's body. "This is a gear oil thing. Had gear oil in it." He stops, scratching his head as he examines the sculpture, trying to deconstruct it. "The legs are just pipe."

He points to a clump of grass beyond the horse. "There's a duck made out of a gas tank and shroud for a small engine." He looks above his head, into a small tree. "And this bird feeder is made out of a light fixture and a motorcycle rim."

He walks around the yard, disassembling everything into its original parts. "That's a motorcycle muffler, and the head is a trimming shear. ... This guy here, that's a mantis deal. His body is a riding mower body, and the head is a light fixture. His teeth are from household appliances."

Around front, used mowers sit for sale in a corral at the edge of a construction zone where they are widening the road. He stops beneath a giant, bell-shaped woman, staring up as she towers over him. He counts off a trash can, a barbecue lid, a frying pan, mower handlebars, spark plugs and bent sections of tubing. On a table nearby sit a row of strange insects.

"What's this one supposed to be?"

"Space object, y'know." He points to the next one in line, an orange bird between two black and silver robotic insects. "And this here is a whirtle bird, and here's a space dog, or space cat— whatever you want to call it."

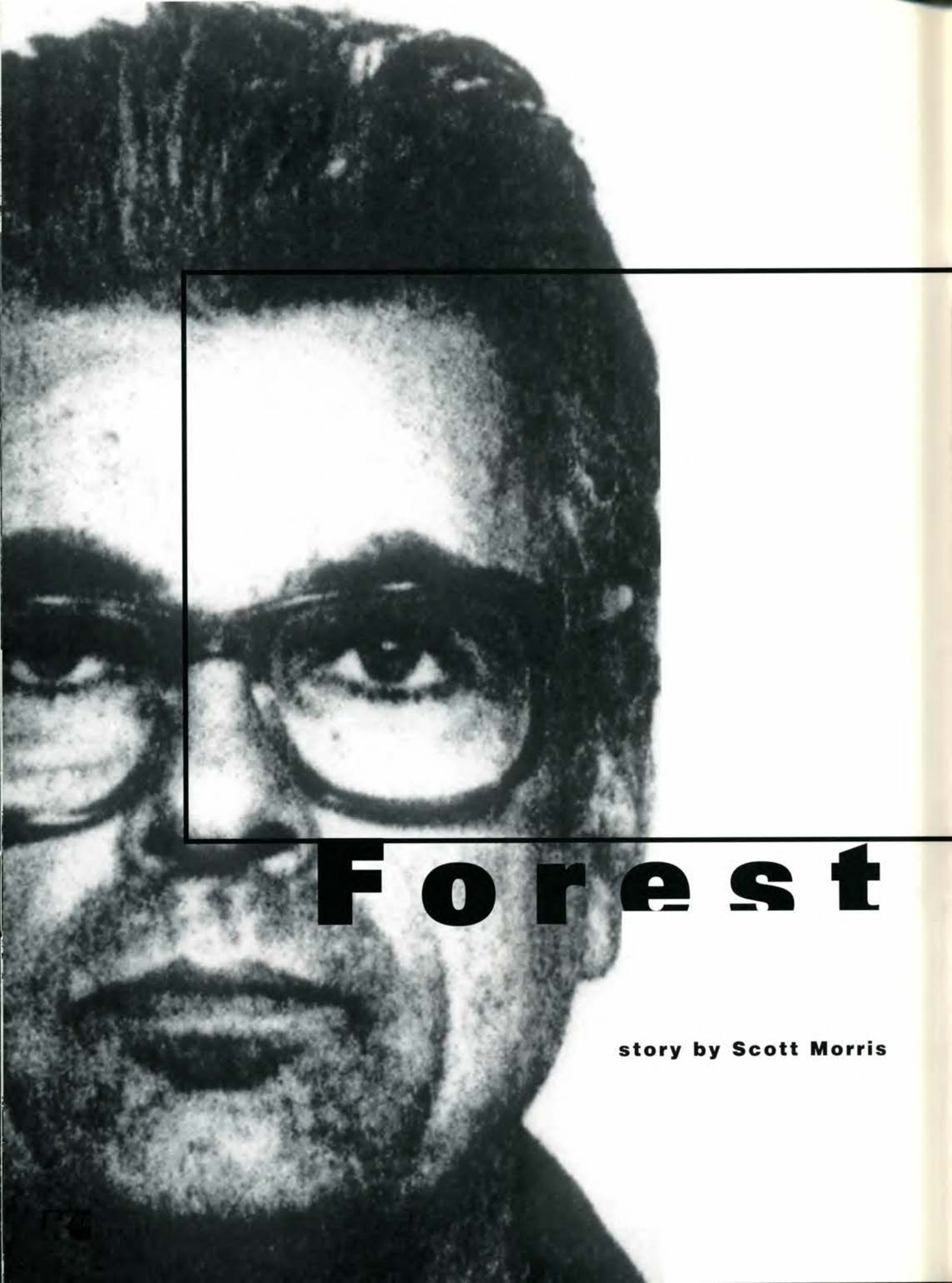
After Walt finishes the rounds again, making a complete circuit of his overstuffed acres, He vanishes once more into the shop. He has a

lot of work to do before he can get back to the banjo he's cutting out of a used wheel. He stops in the doorway, tucked back in all the clutter, and looks out across the mounds of scrap and rusted parts.

Different people see different things. When Walt looks at the creatures that surround him he sees gas tanks and spatulas, teakettles and bent sections of pipe. When he looks at the mundane objects that fill his daily life—that fill all our daily lives—he sees dragonflies and space dogs and wild little beasts.

When he sells his land, the lawnmower repair shop will be gone. He will be free to goof around with all his time. But his vision is a hard thing to translate—not because it is unclear—but because it is so complete and so different. It's taken him the past 30 years just to fill 1.7 acres. 30 years of work, it turns out, was enough for him to build an entire world—all of it through his eyes, and all of it with his own hands. **K**





F o r e s t

story by Scott Morris

The house is dark and silent.

As expected, nobody is home. From the woods across from the gravel driveway, all comings and goings can be monitored. The only neighbors in view turned their lights off a while ago. They should be asleep by now. Time to move in.

Boots rustle on brush, then go silent, padding on the mossy yard, then quietly crunch the gravel drive leading to the front door. A large, very sharp knife is drawn. The tool knows the routine, hacking forcefully along the edge of the triangular wood panel in the lower part of the front door. The wood yields and the triangle falls to rest on the floor inside, just loud enough to race the heart for a beat or two.

Reaching an arm through the hole, the door is unlocked and the chain undone. Pulling the arm back out, the doorknob is turned and the door opened.

Stepping inside, a deafening siren shatters the silence.

Scrambling, the wall unit is located and violently dispatched with a powerful chop.

The siren does not stop.

In desperation, a mad dash to the kitchen reveals only a deliberately empty refrigerator and bare cupboards. The last cupboard door is slammed shut in rage. Wheeling, the next moves are fast and decisive, back out the front door. Pausing only long enough in the front yard to look to the right to make sure the neighbors' lights have not come on, in a dozen long strides, the security of the woods is regained.

Running, the urge to escape takes over. There will be no dinner tonight.

Months later, Phil Vining and Webb Border are squatting, looking intently

at a footprint near The Bulgarian's latest break-in, this time at the Gardners' house. While Border's next-door neighbors, the Reeds, had thwarted The Bulgarian with sirens and empty cupboards, the Gardners had just restocked their summer cabin with groceries. One day later, they are out of food again.

An experienced amateur tracker, Vining knows the specific lug pattern he is looking for. He has sketched and measured similar tracks at other break-ins in this rural area near Darrington. He has gone to the mall, browsing through shoe stores, looking for the exact boot to fit the tracks he has found.

Neither man doubts who made these tracks. Too many doors have been sliced open in Border's rural, wooded neighborhood for it to be a coincidence.

Border and Vining have documented many dozens of break-ins in recent years that fit the pattern: forced entry into an unoccupied house; food and clothing taken; valuables always overlooked. Occasionally a gun, knife, hatchet, flashlight or batteries are taken.

Vining follows the prints, some of which Border does not see, into the woods.

"He sat on that stump for a while," Vining says, pointing to the slight indentations in the stump's moss.

Border strains to see the evidence. From here, the men realize, The Bulgarian could see the Gardners' place, as well as their neighbor Helga's house nearby.

"He probably waited until Helga brought her dog in, so it wouldn't bark at him," Border says.

While Border fingers the moss, Vining is already walking ahead, eyes on the ground.

"He went this way," Vining says.

Border smiles and shakes his head, impressed at how good a tracker

Entry

photography by Ryan Hooser

shoes stolen by Donciev and left in the hills close to the shelter he inhabited for almost 12 years.



Vining has become over the years. A couple of times, Border starts to think Vining is just imagining things, and then an obvious track materializes to confirm their direction.

Just about any break-in within a 15-mile radius in the Stillaguamish River Valley is inevitably attributed to "The Bulgarian" or "The Hungarian" or "The Romanian," thus inflating and distorting the legend the farther down the grapevine it travels. Rumor has it he was a secret police agent, that he killed several people. Some speculate he is a supreme mountain man, hiding out in the hills, unaware the Iron Curtain has fallen.

The truth, it turns out, is far less sensational. The truth is actually very ugly.

Far from a supreme mountain man, The Bulgarian seems to rely on others just as much as those who get food from a grocery store. The Bulgarian's grocery stores, Border points out, are places like the Gardners'.

Legend has it that The Bulgarian is some sort of benevolent burglar who only takes what he needs. Border however, knows those neighbors who empty their cupboards run the risk of finding muddy boot prints across their beds. The Bulgarian even wiped his ass with one of his neighbor's bedspreads.

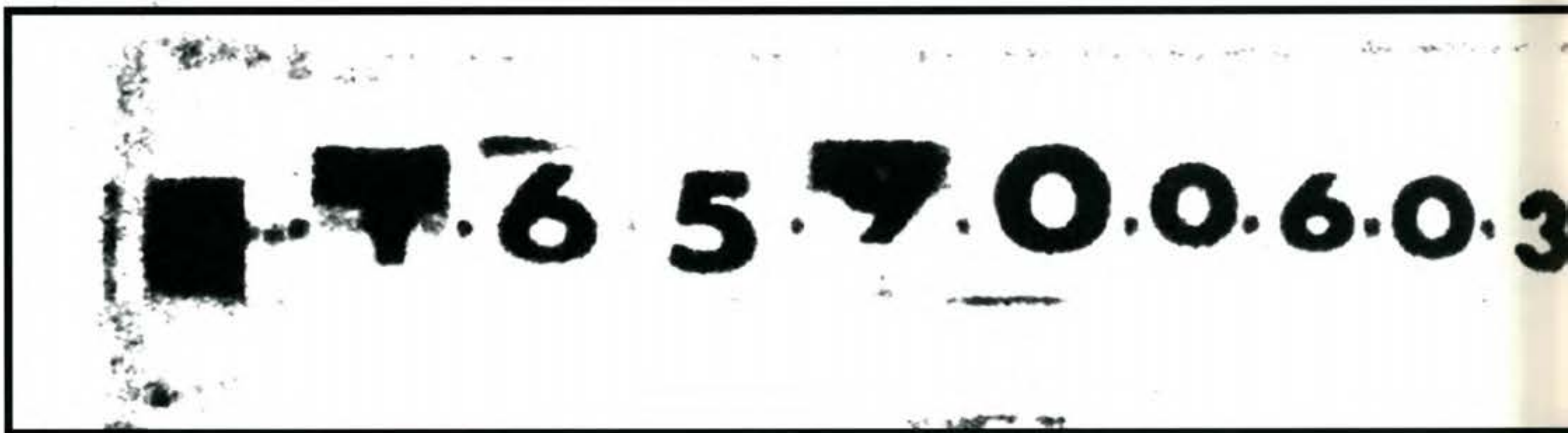
about a face-to-face encounter.

One time, following Donciev's tracks, he found a pair of black, square-rimmed glasses that had been dropped on the ground. They looked like the ones from the mug shot. A little later, Vining heard footsteps of somebody running away and found the fresh tracks of a fleeing human. Alone, he didn't pursue.

At some point, Vining has been thinking for a while now, we're going to have to get serious. Border and friends have been complaining to the sheriff for years, but to the police the break-ins must just seem like little more than pantry raids. Maybe we should bring in Joel, Vining thinks. The people at the sheriff's office might listen to Joel.

Several months later, sitting in his rural home in Darrington, Phil Vining's ears perk up when he hears his police radio. Something has tripped the uphill infrared sensor he and his tracking instructor, Joel Hardin, had hidden along one of The Bulgarian's known routes.

The sheriff did listen to Joel. Based on his 25 years of experience as a former Border Patrol agent, Hardin was hired in November 1997 to help develop



Mincio Vasilev Donciev was born in Bulgaria 67 years ago. When he was 24, Donciev, a normal police officer in his native land, was sentenced to five years in jail for shooting and attempting to kill his father-in-law. Twelve years later, while working as a shepherd, he beat a man to death for stealing his lambs. Sentenced to 20 years for murder, he escaped from a labor camp in 1970.

In 1982, The Bulgarian somehow managed to enter the United States legally. In 1985, Donciev was arrested in King County for allegedly trying to blow up his ex-girlfriend's Lake City apartment with her and her new lover inside. Again, he escaped. He was 55 years old when he disappeared.

The tracks Vining is following have led him out of the trees and onto the embankment of State Highway 530. Twelve years ago, in 1985, soon after Donciev jumped bail, police found his ex-girlfriend's car abandoned on the shoulder of Highway 530, not very far from here.

It wasn't until six years later that police could definitely link a Darrington burglary to The Bulgarian. In February of 1991, police matched fingerprints at a break-in on Border's property to Donciev. After looking up his record, police passed around his old King County mugshots in the neighborhoods where doors were being sliced regularly. But no one has ever seen him in these parts.

Crossing the highway, Vining and Border follow the tracks through a stand of second-growth forest, eventually intersecting with the dirt road beneath the powerlines. Vining follows the far edge of the road, eventually finding the spot where the tracks re-enter the trees.

The two men find more than just tracks. They find piles of half-buried trash and canisters that have been burned from the inside. Empty mayonnaise jars, medicine bottles, leather boots, tin cans apparently sawed open with a knife—most of these items have been stuffed haphazardly under the moss. Someone has sat here many times, from the trampled look of the vegetation.

The tracks, Vining knows, go a lot farther than this, but they are not prepared today to continue. It's a familiar dilemma: He would love to follow these tracks to the end, but given Donciev's violent record, Vining is uneasy

a plan to capture The Bulgarian. He reviewed data from the break-ins during the past five years, looking for patterns. The tracks Hardin and Vining have found all seem to lead up to a certain area on the rain-soaked, forested ridge of Whitehorse Mountain.

Vining moves over to the radio and waits. A deer, he knows, would meander. It is unlikely that it will walk directly down the hill like a human will. If it's The Bulgarian, a second infrared tripwire about a quarter-mile downhill will automatically send an identifying radio signal.

The second signal comes over the radio a few minutes later.

It's him, Vining thinks.

Still, to remove all doubt, they placed a third sensor at a similar interval further downhill. An animal might trip two of them, but three almost guarantees it is a human.

A couple of weeks earlier, in February, all three sensors went off in the anticipated human time intervals, but the human was heading uphill instead of downhill. The Bulgarian had taken a different route down, broken into some homes, then tripped the sensors on the way back up.

The third signal sings out, and Phil nods to himself. Picking up the phone, he calls the sheriff's office.

Deputy Rick Hawkins, sitting in an unmarked car on a country lane in Webb Border's neighborhood, sees a flashlight flick on and off quickly as a shadowy figure moves through the woods between two houses. He radios for a second deputy to bring Yukon, a German shepherd police dog, then he moves to an advantageous position at the old railroad grade. Grabbing his night-vision goggles, he silently gets out of the car.

Sure enough, a man with a walking stick emerges from the trees and follows the grade away from Hawkins, unaware he is being watched. Yukon arrives and is quickly unleashed, with the deputies moving behind.

Just after the man crosses the bridge over French Creek, the dog leaps and grabs him by the neck. Man and dog tumble off the grade, down into a patch of salmonberry. The deputies rush in. Blood, salmonberry, a flailing walking

stick, fangs, claws and three men struggle violently as snarls and curses fill the air for a tense moment.

Finally, the deputies manage to restrain the man. Yukon has left him bleeding badly on his neck and foot—he has lost a lot of flesh. Shining a light in his face, the deputies get their first good look at the man who has eluded them for 12 years. No surprise—it is Donciev.

Halfway up Whitehorse Mountain, a few weeks after Donciev's arrest, Hardin and Vining are still tracking The Bulgarian. A few months ago, they had been at this very spot late one afternoon when Hardin sensed they were getting close to Donciev. Not prepared at the time for a confrontation, and not wanting to tip their hand, the trackers had retreated.

Now that The Bulgarian is nursing his severely mangled foot (thanks to Yukon) in an Everett hospital, while he awaits trial, the trackers have returned to look for answers. How did he live up here? What did he do in his free time? How did he cope with the isolation?

The tracks lead up a steep rock formation in the drippy cedar forest. Almost 3,000 feet up, this spot on the north face of Whitehorse gets hammered by wind, rain and snow year-round. The sun never makes it over the ridge.

The men top the rise and find a surprising amount of garbage strewn about—jars, cans, food containers. Rummaging about, they stumble across a tarp. Someone has piled sticks and brush very cleverly, hiding a sort of lean-to structure that has been dug into the ground. Hardin's hunches a few months ago had been right—they had been very close.

Vining crawls in through a hole in the top for a look. The whole thing is just barely long enough for a man to stretch out in. It is only four feet tall. In the corner, ashes remain from a small, well-used fire pit. Next to the fire pit, a square, two-foot deep hole has been cut out of the floor. Vining sits on the floor and drops his legs into the square hole. This was The Bulgarian's chair.

Hardin is struck by how primitive it all is. They can't find any whittlings, carvings, crafts, no papers or journals. Hardin expected to find at least a few signs of creativity after 12 years of isolation. He wonders if Donciev is the type of man who can shut himself down mentally, in order to survive. The shelter is so small, you can't even stand up inside. How many hours did Donciev spend sitting or lying down in this dark, dank hole, listening to the interminable rain?

Vining pops back out of the shelter. After studying the signs for a long while, they close the structure back tightly and cinch their bags for the return trip down the mountain. They came for answers; but they are leaving with just as many questions as ever. **K**



above: a small cabin that donciev used temporarily as shelter.

below: Web Border shows some of the damage done by Donciev during a burglary.





K9 UNITY

STORY BY FRED SHEFFIELD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY TIM KLEIN



Three Alaskan malamutes, ranging in size from big to absolutely huge, wrestle in the back of a yellow pick-up truck. They rear up on their hind legs and bare their teeth, recklessly hurling slobber in every direction. Just then, a lean man in his late 30s, wearing rugged gray pants, a T-shirt and a backward baseball cap, props a leg on a tire and hurls himself into the bed of the truck. For a second, he is almost lost in a sea of black-and-white fur and the sounds of snarls and growls. He grabs hold of one dog, and flips the 200-pound animal out of the truck bed. The dogs remaining in the truck begin to settle down.

"They're usually not like this," says Gary Winkler, still standing in the bed of his truck. "It's spring time though, and I think these boys are just fighting over who gets the girls when they get home."

Moments later, Winkler opens the gate of the truck, and the remaining dogs jump out. Although they are still covered in each other's slobber from the squabble, the malamutes greet each other with the eagerness of long lost friends.

The scene transpires in mere seconds, yet it tells volumes. What kind of guy would jump in the middle of 600 pounds of brawling dogs? Gary Winkler

happens to be precisely that kind of guy.

All his life, Winkler has been guided by three objectives: Doing things himself, doing things to the extreme and doing things with his dogs. The intersection of these elements is a business Winkler calls "K9 Visual Images Incorporated."

For the last several years, Winkler and the 10 Alaskan malamutes—who take turns riding in the back of his yellow pick-up—have become well-known Bellingham residents. But the faces of the black-and-white dogs are not only being seen on streets and in parking lots. Since Winkler started K9 Visual Images Inc., members of the pack have appeared in more than 200 television commercials, TV shows and motion pictures.

In the next several years, the dogs are scheduled to appear in motion pictures that might make them stars. Winkler has been heavily involved in the creation of two productions, "The Wolfgang Nine" and "Fade to White," that will feature all the dogs in prominent roles.

In "Fade to White," an action-adventure film, the dogs will be part of an elite plane-crash rescue team. They will be equipped with cameras, flashlights and headsets so they can be commanded from a remote location.



"The Wolfgang Nine" promises to give the malamutes a chance to refine their dramatic skills as they befriend children on a misfit baseball team.

"I think they can be stars, almost in the same way a human can," Winkler says. "I've never seen anything attract attention the way they do. Sure, people notice them because of their size and appearance, but I think it goes beyond that. They have a personality and intelligence that I've never seen in other dogs."

As a boy growing up in Bellingham, Winkler worked in kennels and became familiar with all types of dogs. But he never came across a malamute until a college roommate asked him to dog-sit his malamute for the summer.

"After having him a couple months, his intelligence level was just astounding to me," Winkler says.

When the malamute came into his life, Winkler was trying to get over two of his passions: downhill skiing and the music business.

The skiing career he spent most of his adolescence training for went down the tubes after he was involved in a series of accidents.

"That's just the kind of thing where, if you have any fear at all, you're not going to be successful," Winkler says. "I hit a couple trees doing 70, and that was the end of my career."

Winkler had also been playing drums in a band whose popularity was increasing steadily. And, with that popularity, came the fast-paced life of a rock star.

"It was pretty cool at first, but after awhile all the women and the drugs just got to be a little too much," he says.

In an attempt to sever himself from the rock-and-roll scene, Winkler gave up playing the drums almost entirely.

"It's still really hard not to play them," he says. "I think about it everyday. But it's like a girl who you're in love with, and you know it just won't work with her—you just can't go back."

Giving the malamute back to his friend in the midst of his other losses became an unexpectedly difficult duty.

"As soon as the dog was gone, I just felt this void in my life. I spent the next couple months looking around the region basically trying to find the duplicate of that dog."

Winkler found what he was looking for in an animal he named Bear.

After college, Winkler went to work at Boeing in Seattle. The job paid well, but left a lot to be desired.

"I'm an adrenaline junkie right down to the bottom—it runs my life," he says. "I just couldn't see spending my days just sitting in an office; that's just not who I am."

Winkler left the job and headed north, to Alaska, where he spent his days diving into rivers, searching for gold.

It was in Skagway that Winkler began giving sled rides to cruise-ship tourists and noticed the attention Bear was drawing.

"I would hear people on the ship traveling back and forth saying, 'Oh did you see that dog in Skagway?' That was the best part of our trip."

Winkler also tells of a time when he left Bear with a friend who worked at a gift shop catering to tourists. When Winkler came back to get the dog, the store owner was reluctant to give the dog back because sales had increased so dramatically with it standing outside.

But the big break came when the movie "Never Cry Wolf" was shot in Skagway. Being in a small town, it didn't take much for movie producers to



notice the distinctive animal, and Bear landed in several scenes in front of the Red Onion Saloon.

Realizing the potential for the dogs to make it in show business, Winkler bred Bear with other malamutes. All 10 of Winkler's malamutes—Rocky Bear, Honey Bear, Teddy Bear, Fuzzy Bear, Paddington Bear, Polar Bear, Yogi Bear, Grizzly Bear, Pooh Bear and Gummi Bear—are descendants of the original Bear.

Winkler returned to Bellingham and began seeking opportunities to get the dogs on film.

For the first few years, Winkler's business was slow. He was an unknown, selling an unknown product, in a business that's all about who you know. Still, Winkler had his tactics.

"I knew a lady in Bellingham who would tell me anytime they were going to shoot a commercial in the area. I would just drive to the shoot and just run right past them with all the dogs. Sometimes nothing happened, but a couple times the producer would see the dogs and rewrite the commercial for them right on the spot."

Eventually, Winkler's name began to circulate, and it wasn't long before advertisement and movie producers were calling him. Winkler's "Bears" began making appearances in TV shows, such as "Northern Exposure," and in movies such as "The Lost Boys" and "Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade."

On the set, Winkler says, his dogs have been models of perfection.

"Sometimes I've only had about a day to train them for a scene, but they always seem to pull it off," he says. "I'm usually just freaking out, hoping that everything goes all right. I think they can sense that though. They sense that 'this must be pretty important to daddy,' and they usually pull it off perfectly."

Winkler says he has never been fearful of the dogs turning on someone,

either on a movie set, or while in the back of the truck.

"In all the years of driving them around in the truck and having them on sets, they've never come close to getting violent with somebody," Winkler says. "They're raised around people, and besides—that's just not the personality of the breed at all."

As Winkler became more familiar with the Hollywood scene, he began to contemplate a career in movie writing, producing or directing. He says he has ideas for about 15 screenplays; eight include the dogs. The movie "Fade to White," written with help from Andrew W. Marlow, writer of the movie "Air Force One," promises to be the first major motion picture Winkler will play a key role in.

But Winkler insists the dogs are much more than a way to get his foot in the door of Hollywood. They are truly his family.

Every summer, Winkler cuts off a pair of his old "beater" skis, attaches them to tennis shoes, and heads up to the mountains. He climbs mountains and skis down in remote areas, often totally alone, if it wasn't for the companionship of "the Bears."

"If I got hurt or stuck up there, the dogs could either go get help, or pull me down the mountain. Plus, they love to go places, so they're a good match for me."

From the adrenaline rushes of skiing, to the wild life of a rock star, Winkler has refused to let his life resemble anything close to normal. Whether they make it in Hollywood or not, Winkler has found some friends willing to help him push the limits of life.

"The dogs are a part of my life forever, regardless of what I go on to do," he says. "They're as much a part of me as oxygen is to most people." **K**



carnival

know

story by steven
photography by j

Annette Stiles moves around one corner of the Rainbow Table. The table, painted glaring white and decorated with dozens of identical rainbows, still bears a few tossed quarters, none of which have fallen inside one of the elusive winner's bands. A patina of glitter, applied to Stiles' face and hands, reflects the multi-colored lights of the midway. She pulls at the pink sleeve of her Davis Amusement Cascadia uniform jacket and winks suggestively at a couple passing by.

"Come and play with The Rainbow Lady?" she asks.

The couple answers with an awkward giggle and a polite shake of the head, continuing north up the midway to where the big rides lie in wait. Stiles shrugs.

"You can't disappoint The Rainbow Lady," she says, idly tossing a quarter onto the Rainbow Table. "She's never disappointed."

Stiles has proudly called herself a carnie for the better part of 16 years, and will probably continue to do so until the day she dies.

"It's in the blood," she explains.

We've all seen them, the carnies. We've played their games, ridden their rides and eaten their elephant ears. Seldom, however, are they more than the tearers of tickets or the proud new owners of dollar bills wagered on softball-throwing ability. Just faces and voices, extolling theirs

as the finest ride or easiest game at the fair.

They are people though. Part of an insular society, a makeshift family brought together by months on end spent together on the road.

As is the case for many of the carnies, the carnival is not just a way of life for Stiles, but rather a reference point around which her life revolves. After all, only a true carnie can make the statement "I have a 15-year-old daughter, and she was conceived under a Tilt-a-Whirl in Roswell, New Mexico," and still beam with girlish pride.

People come to the carnival to work for a variety of reasons— some to escape, some to belong, some to hide and some to find that inexplicable thing they've been looking for.

"It's an awesome life," Stiles says, her eyes constantly combing the crowd for potential customers.

A young boy, just on the cusp of becoming a man, ambles up to the Rainbow Table booth and disengages his hand from his gum-chewing girlfriend. He tosses a quarter at the table and grimaces as he watches it spin onto the white "no win" area. Stiles looks around and hands his girlfriend a small prize anyway.

"There's always going to be one game that you remember at the carnival," Stiles explains, "so why not make it the Rainbow Table?"



ledge

hles
ustin coyne

Stiles continues, effortlessly maintaining her Rainbow Lady persona.

"The table of happiness, the table of joy, the table of shine," she spouts, now speaking in the dulcet nouveau-New-Age tone usually reserved for clerks at health food stores.

"Everyone has their own personalities," she says, gazing at some far-off point in space. "Everyone has their own auras and they come to my table and shine, shine, shine."

Then, like taking off a winter coat, Stiles shakes her Rainbow Lady act.

"But there isn't a joint on the line I can't run," she says, now all business. "I can do them all."

She points at the long line of booths, 'joints' in the carnival parlance, as heads poke out over the counters to cajole passers-by.

"We're like a family out here; everybody," she says, gesturing to the row of disembodied torsos, each firmly ensconced at rifle shoots, ring tosses and dart throws. "Randy is my brother; Matt is my brother; Jeff is my brother, and Laura ..." Stiles pauses, lending significance to a young woman with a handful of darts' designation, "... Laura is my sister."

Laura Reed stands in a small booth at the center of a long line of

games of skill and chance. At her back hangs a haphazard quilt of posters, most of which bear the scars of countless thrown darts.

The grinning face of Leonardo DeCaprio bears so many pricks, he is nearly unrecognizable. He also bears a small, hand-written sign that reads 'Sold Out.'

"Hey!" she yells to nobody in particular. "A poster every time. You can't lose. You always win."

Unable to attract any business, Reed lifts her shoulders in the same resigned manner as her "sister."

"We call it a fishing game," she says, miming a little rod-and-reel action. "You know, 'Reel 'em in.'"

Reed has traveled with the carnival for two years, and, in fact, met her husband there. She joined after her RV died on her. She found herself jobless, surfing from couch to couch in friends' homes, barely keeping her head above water.

"It's fun," she says of the carnival. "I've got my own job, my own place to stay; I get money everyday; I got food everyday; I got cigarettes whenever I need them. I'm not without—and if I weren't here I would be without."

A small girl, barely tall enough to see over the counter

wanders up to Reed's booth with \$2 clutched in her hand. Reed takes her money, hands her a dart, and steps out of the line of fire. The girl throws her dart with surprising accuracy, sticking Winnie the Pooh right in the honey pot. A smile spreads across her face.

"It feels good to see the little kids smile because they won a prize," Reed says, rolling up the Pooh poster for her young customer. "That's what I like about this job."

Reed hands the poster over to the girl. Before letting go, Reed tells her she has one more thing she wants her to do—and requests a high-five. The girl smiles and slaps as high as she can. Reed sends her on her way with an affectionate "Right on."

Reed says she's ready to get off the road, to settle down with her new husband. She looks forward to the end of the season when they can apply what she hopes will be a healthy bonus check to a new RV.

"If I get a good bonus and my husband gets a good bonus, then I'll be gone," Reed says, waving to the posters behind her. "It'll be 'Good-bye posters.'"

Reed's husband, Ed Day, works a booth a short distance away, enticing people to roll racquetballs into numbered slots for obscenely large Tasmanian Devils.

"I joined the carnival because of some legal problems here in the state," Day says, handing balls to one of his customers. "I had to get out, so I joined the carnival. I've been out here ever since."

That was nearly five years ago.

Like most carnival employees, Day is left to fend for himself during the show's four-month downtime, which lasts from early November to early March.

"In the off-season I do anything I can," Day says, grimacing slightly. "Last winter I spent the winter in jail."

Day watches as a prospective contestant looks over his game and then moves on to a booth across the way.

"That's the biggest sucker game right across from me," says Day, shaking his head as his lost client is handed a handful of rope rings.

"That's the biggest rip-off I've ever seen in my life. People spend more money over there and all they get is shit. They'll win something and every time it will be crap—some cheap little hacky-sack or something."

Day raises a hand to wave at another man wearing the bright Davis Amusement uniform. The man nods his head in acknowledgment. He says that the man isn't a "jointy," someone who runs a game, but rather a "ride jock," who pilots one of the rapidly spinning machines at the far end of the midway.

"It used to be that the jointies and the ride jocks did not associate," Day explains. "They stayed on their rides, we stayed in our joints, we partied with people who worked the joints; they partied with people who worked the rides. That was that."

The ride jock, Darrell Holtz, now stands silhouetted against the bright-green lights of a whirling mechanical octopus.

"The Green Thing," he says, looking over his shoulder. "That's my ride; best ride here."

As is the case with any of the midway's big spinners, Holtz acknowledges that vomit is a very real occupational hazard, and has learned to watch for the threat.

"I can pick a puker before they get on the ride," he says, taking tickets from the line of people waiting for a few minutes of accelerated g-force.

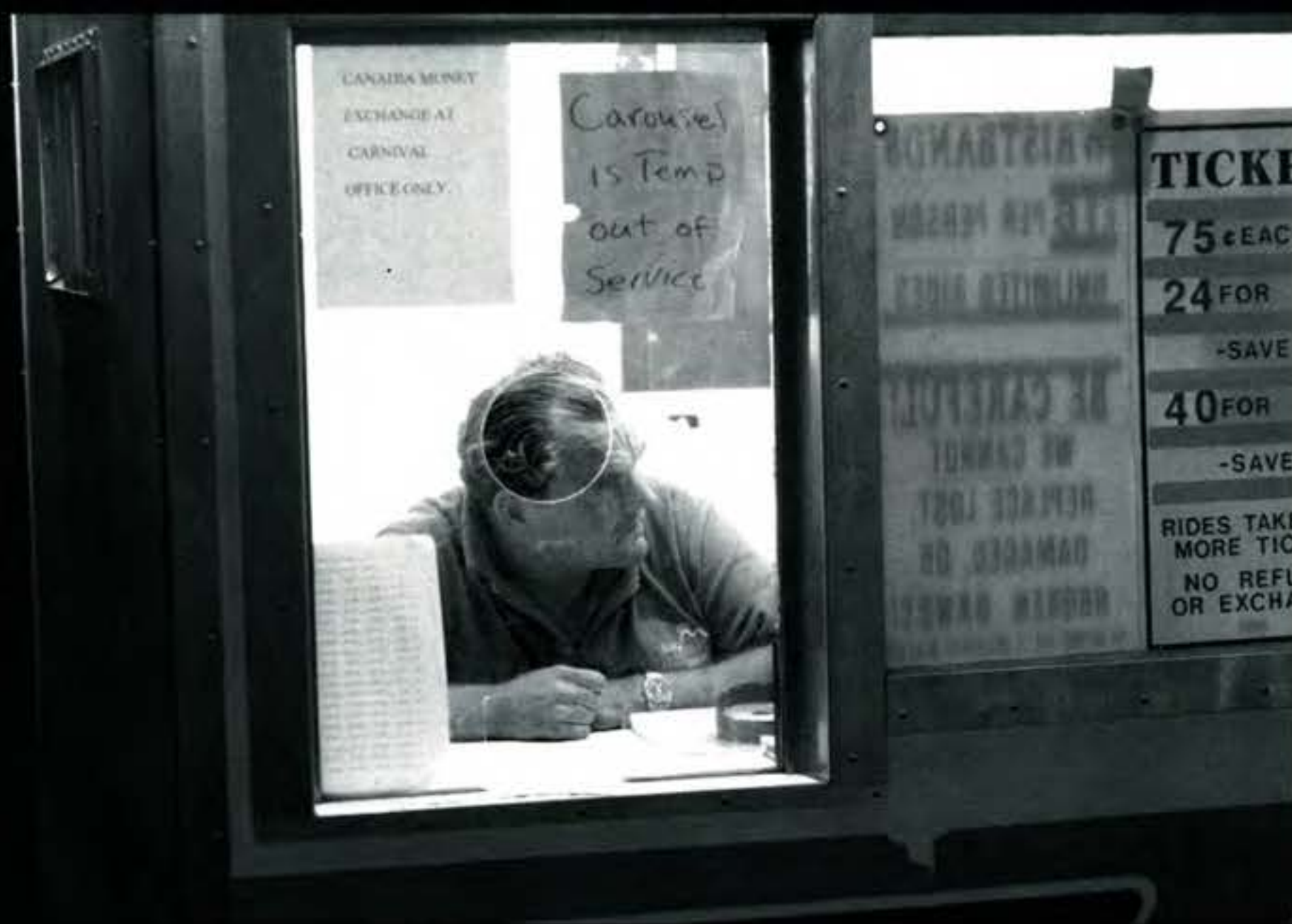
He admits some get through, however.

"Some days I don't get any pukers, some days I'll get five, six, 10—it depends," he says as the arms begin to spin slowly and the seed-pod cars start to rotate on their axis.

"I don't like 'em to puke too much though—slows me down," he says as the ride picks up speed. "I've got to clean it up, you know."

As unpleasant as it may be, vomit is not the ride jock's greatest occupational hazard. The real stress comes from safety.

"With the ride set up here, I have to keep it blocked," Holtz says, pointing to the wooden blocks that keep the ride level on the sloping parking lot. "That means shutting it down every hour and making sure it's still level."



Jim Parks knows about the safety of carnivals as well. He grew up in carnivals, and now runs one of Davis Amusement Cascadia's two units.

"You hear the talk all over about unsafe rides and this and that, but our industry is actually a lot more safe than any other industry in the world that moves people," Parks says, perching himself on a tall stool inside the wood-paneled trailer that houses the carnival offices. "I mean planes, buses, cars—they have a lot more accidents than we do—and we move more people."

"Ours are just exposed a little more because it is a carnival, it is entertainment."

Carnivals' reputation for being unsafe lead to one of their greatest expenses—insurance.

"We have to have a \$5 million insurance policy every time we set up," Parks says.

The second greatest expense, he explains, is lightbulbs.

"I order probably a couple thousand bulbs in a month's time," he says, glancing forward to the front of the trailer. "It's one of our bigger expenses."

Parks admits that some of the allure of the carnival is gone for him.

"It's OK," he says, talking about the constant travel. "I used to like it a lot more when I was younger. I've been doing it so long now that no, it's not fun."

Parks says the long hours—taking up to 24 hours to set up and 12 to break down—are what he finds hardest.

"The younger guys, they may stay up and party a little," Parks says, glancing out the window as the carnival begins to wind down. "But us older guys have to get some sleep."

Parks' wife, Debbie, also grew up around carnivals, and continues to work for Davis Amusements.

"I'll be doing this forever," she says, laughing at the idea of leaving.

"My daughter would have been a fourth generation," she says, her back to a large window that overlooks the games. "I'm a third generation, and if I didn't like it, I wouldn't do it."

"My daughter has bigger dreams," she says, as her daughter Danielle, as if on cue, walks through the door. "She's going to be a psychologist."

Danielle, a student at Western, says that although she doesn't want to devote her life to the carnival, it will always be a part of her.

"These people, a lot of them I grew up with," she says, snapping off a bite of carnival licorice. "They're like sisters and brothers to me."

"We have a guy whose been with us for 22 years," Debbie adds. "When you do time with somebody like that, they are a part of your family."

"Our games manager has been with us for 14 years," she continues, picking up long ledger sheets and bank bags. "His father died young. He has nobody. There's a lot of people that have nobody but us."

With that, Danielle and Debbie Parks turn toward the window and silently begin to total the evening's receipts. Over their shoulders the midway can be seen spreading out into the night. There, the last few hardy patrons still mill among the booths and games, perhaps pausing for a moment to throw a dart, toss a ring or accepting an invitation to play with the Rainbow Lady. **K**



story and photography by Ryan Hooser



LOVE

BITES



Ken Garver III walked into his small, white house after a nine-hour work day and noticed that something wasn't right. Klaus, his cat, stood on the kitchen counter, back arched and hair raised, emitting a low moan. Garver slowly approached to see what was wrong when, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a large green object. He instantly knew what it was and what was wrong with Klaus. Agnes had gotten out of her tank.



After some chasing, Garver herded the four-foot-long, hissing reptile into the corner of his kitchen with a broom. He pinned its snapping jaws to the floor and picked it up, softly murmuring, "Come on Aggie, take it easy." Being very careful to keep a firm grip

on the mandibles of the squirming reptile, he gently set the writhing animal back into its 100-gallon tank.

Agnes, a common caiman, a close relative of the crocodile, is only one of Garver's uncommon pets. He cares for all sorts of hairy, slithery and scaly creatures. He owns 19 snakes—seven of which are venomous—five tarantulas, two

American alligators, Agnes the caiman and one giant Peruvian centipede that feeds on adult mice. Luckily, Agnes' escape was an isolated incident among Garver's pets.

"It's not something that you see everyday," Garver said, running a hand over his short blond hair. "I have a tarantula on my desk at work, and when people first saw it, they would freak out and squeal and stuff. Now they come back and stare at it." Despite his fascination, he knows that not everyone loves these creatures like he does. When he still lived with his parents, he kept snakes, lizards and spiders as pets in his room—that is, until they found out that he had snakes, lizards and spiders.

"Judy couldn't handle it, so I moved out," Garver said matter-of-factly about his

stepmother. "She's scared to death of snakes. None of them were venomous, but she didn't care. She still didn't like them."

After he moved out and was free from parental restraints, his collection grew. The living room of his new house became cluttered with aquarium tanks, each harboring a scaly new tongue-flicking pet. Spiders in fishbowls sat on window sills, and a book shelf stacked with clear Tupperware containers served as a hibernation hotel for many of Garver's cold-blooded companions during the winter months.

His girlfriend, Kirstin, wasn't comfortable with the increasingly crowded living situation and let Garver know in no uncertain terms.

"She didn't like them upstairs, and I guess I didn't really, either," Garver said.

He decided it was best to set up the basement to accommodate his hobby.

The walls of Garver's basement became lined with shelves, stacked with clear Tupperware containers. Rows of scales showed where the snakes rested against the fogged plastic. Aquariums and plexiglass boxes filled the remainder of the basement, each containing creatures dear to Garver. A large cage, constructed of framing lumber and Plexiglass, rested in the corner, harboring Agnes. Then, almost as a natural progression, Garver began to acquire venomous, or "hot," snakes.

"Anyone with a credit card can call Florida and have them deliver the snakes to the airport. You just have to go pick it up," Garver said.

Through this mail-order service, it is possible to get green mombas, or even Egyptian cobras—some of the deadliest snakes on the planet.

"I try to stay away from those ones, though," Garver said, sticking to the more mundane timber rattlesnakes, gaboon vipers, northern pacific rattlers, cobras—shield nose and water and the ominous-sounding puff adder.

Garver's alligators, spiders and pets other than snakes are dangerous but don't pose nearly as acute a danger as his "hot" snakes.

"If one of the tarantulas bites you, it will just be like a bee sting. But if you touch it, don't rub your eyes. The hairs can blind you," Garver said.

Agnes, the caiman, isn't the cuddliest of creatures, either. Her narrow, snapping jaws pose a definite threat as well.

"Agnes could take a finger off easily," he said. "As for the giant centipede, it is very poisonous."

The snakes, however, "are the ones to watch out for," he said.

"I'm pretty careful around the hot ones," he said. "They can kill you if you get bit in the wrong place and don't get to a hospital in time. Some of the more exotic ones would be even worse to be bitten by because no hospital in Washington is going to carry an anti-venom for a snake that comes from Africa."

Even for experienced people, the risk of death is very serious when dealing with venomous snakes. Victor Kochajada, reptile expert at Sunset Pets, said, "They found the head of the herpalogical society dead on the ground halfway to his car. He was bitten by his cobra. There are only so many wackos who are into that stuff."

Had the head of the herpalogical society made it to the hospital, he wouldn't have found any anti-venom there. Niccole Breining, an employee in the pharmaceutical department at St. Joseph hospital, reported not having any anti-venom in stock. However, Garver's fascination with the animals overpowered his fear of a snake bite, despite the irreversible implications.

"To me, they're beautiful," Garver said as he opened the tank of a sand-colored rattlesnake.



"The patterns on the scales are so intricate."

He held up a portion of an old screen from a window with one hand and clung to a three-foot-long metal hook with the other as he approached the snake. The intermittent, rhythmic beat of the snake's tail turned to a an unerving hum as Garver approached the tank like a soldier holding a sword and shield. He coaxed the creature into the corner of its tank, changed its water, cleaned its tank and slowly retreated, never taking his eyes off the coiled snake.

"It makes me a little nervous, but I know they will never get out," Garver said. "It's too cold in Washington for them to want to get out. Snakes seek warmth, so they wouldn't leave a warm tank."

Garver may be right. Evan Dossa, the animal control lead person at Whatcom Humane Society, said, "We've never went out on any venomous snake calls, but more and more people are owning them now."

Garver has endured difficulties and risks because of these animals, he but remains enthralled by them. Garver's fascination outweighed safety concerns and the repulsion that those around him might have to his pets. This general aversion most humans have toward his pets may have forced Garver to retreat to his basement, but it couldn't make him give the animals up.

"It's the thrill of having something that no one else has," Garver said. "You won't see animals like these at the zoo or anything, but you'll see them in my basement." **K**



a stone's throw from h o m e



Perhaps it wasn't the rock that struck Jess Torcaso that made her realize how strong she was. It was the first stone cast by that particular stranger, but it wasn't the first endured by Jess. It was more like a skipping stone that rippled her life, compared to the boulders that had previously been hurled at her.

So, when she picked that rock up and flung it into the wall of hillside bushes, it didn't matter that she didn't know what direction to aim for; it was just her fighter's instinct refusing to take it lying down.

It would be a while before she would realize the full repercussions of that day. It would be after meeting with university administration and speaking at a hate crime forum when she would understand that she finally had the support she'd always wanted—the community she needed.

Her platinum buzz-cut is striking, yet it fits her. The silver rings and purple stones that line her earlobes are almost excessive in contrast with her white t-shirt and baggy jeans.

Her slanted eyes seem daunting and stern, until she speaks; then they become warm. When the 20-year-old talks about memories that are emotional for her, her eyes moisten just enough to show her sincerity.

The chain that she wears around her neck, dangles a boxing glove and heart emblem. The pendants remind her to fight with heart. The idea for the pairing came from her favorite film, "The Power of One," which also contains the quote: "Even a waterfall begins with just one drop of water."

A sign that hangs above the light switch in her room has a green letter "L" with the words "New Driver" underneath. A friend of hers gave it to her when she became an open lesbian her freshman year at Western.

At that time she was still, in her words, a baby dyke. She uses that word with the belief that many minorities have found empowerment in the words used by some to oppress them.

Besides, dyke is just her first name, she explains. Her last name is lesbian. Friends may use her first name, but acquaintances should use her last name.

The stranger who yelled her first name from the ridge that day was not only presumptuous; he was heartless. He had not taken the effort to get to know her. Had he known of the struggles she had endured throughout her life, maybe his fingers would have reconsidered and held on tighter to the rock.

Jess is the youngest of three girls who grew up in Sumner, Washington. Fights were common around her house; her oldest sister April argued with her mother while Jess argued with her middle sister, Danielle.

"I was a tough little shit," Jess said. "I had to be kind of scrappy just to survive."

Jess was the kind of kid who stood up to the bullies. She knew the plight of the outcast, the misfit.

"I tried to reach out to that person because I think I kind of related," Jess said.

While pig-tailed girls chased boys on the playground, Jess thought boys were stupid—more baseball pals than crushes. That fact would confuse her for years.

She was blessed with natural athletic abilities, which gave her the perception of being tough. Her

strong sense of social justice made her intolerant to mean kids, and she let them know it in no direct way.

Until one rainy day in the fifth grade, when a girl struck Jess in the face without reason. Enraged, Jess chased after the girl, determined to hit her back.

"I caught her, and was just about to beat the crap out of her, and I stopped and thought about what I was actually doing," Jess said. "And that was the day I stopped bullying people."

Somehow Jess put her temper aside, although it had been building for some time. In grade school her mother remarried, and the long empty paternal space had been filled. Her real father left her mother three months after their Christmas season wedding, when she became pregnant with Jess.

"I always tease her, and tell her (becoming pregnant with me) was the best thing I ever did for her," Jess said, laughing at the irony of the painful memory.

At the same time, Jess was angry because she had no connection with her father.

"It's always been a struggle for me," she said. "In one respect it really drives me. I've always had this idea that, if I ever met him, I'd want him to be sorry that he didn't have anything to do with me."

On a summer trip to visit her sister in California, Jess made her first gay friend, Chris. She became pen pals with him for the next two years.

In sixth grade, Jess made her second gay friend, Bret, who was a sophomore in high school. She was the only one who knew he was gay.

By the eighth grade, Jess had an idea she was gay.

"I was in love with my best friend; I had to be around her all the time," Jess said. "At that point, I knew."

Jess read an article in Sassy magazine about how young people fear they are gay because they have feelings about friends of the same sex. The article said it was just a phase, and the kids would grow out of it.

"I thought 'Whew!' It'll go away!" Jess said.

She never did lose her attraction toward women. However, other losses were just around the corner. In an effort to make sense of her own sexuality, Jess encouraged her gay friends to come out to their families.

"I thought, 'You know, they're both great kids; they have no reason not to accept them,'" Jess said. "I was naive to say the least. That, and I was dealing with issues of my own. So, I wanted a positive role model, someone to have a positive experience, so that I knew it was okay."





klipsun/ryan hooser

But, her mission to obtain a positive role model failed.

After not being accepted by his family, her friend, Bret, ended up parked by the river in his dad's truck. After drinking an excessive amount of beer, he shot himself with a 12 gauge shotgun.

"I loved him a lot," Jess said. "That was a big blow.

"I remember going to the memorial service and seeing his boyfriend sitting there. And, no one was consoling him. He just sat there, alone, and that was really painful to watch."

Three weeks after the funeral, Jess received a letter from her pen pal, Chris. He had committed suicide, too.

"He actually mailed his suicide letter to me," Jess said. "And Chris didn't know Bret at all; it was just one weird coincidence. Chris had told his father (he was gay) and (his father) freaked out.

"Chris was going to a university to play baseball; he was everything you could want from a kid," she said. "So, I began to associate who I was with a death sentence."

That year, in high school, Jess played volleyball, basketball, and fast-pitch baseball. As she approached an important basketball game, she found out that her grandfather was undergoing heart surgery.

She was dedicated to her team, so she told her grandfather she would be thinking of him.

"I had the best game of my life," Jess said. "But my grandfather passed

away that night."

The tough kid, who had never shown emotion, learned to cry that year. Though she had always tried not to burden her mother with her problems, the deaths of three loved ones in four months triggered Jess' need for comfort.

"Before that, I had never cried," Jess said. "Now, I cry at the drop of a hat; it really opened up the flood gates."

Jess dived into activities to distract her from the hurt she was feeling, but that didn't work. She ran for sophomore class president and won. However, her grades fell, and she was close to dropping out of school.

She developed insomnia at one point, going nine days with only three hours sleep. The worst was still to come.

"When I started drinking, I was sober probably three days out of a six-month period," Jess said.

She hid her drinking problem well. She would only drink enough to numb the pain. But, who could tell? She was sophomore class president.

That summer, Jess went to camp as a counselor. The teachers warned her about a particular girl with behavior problems.

"She was absolutely the best kid you could ever know. She was awesome. And all it took was just giving her a chance," Jess said. "She really taught me that I was in charge of my own destiny...that was her name actually."

That first week at camp was Jess' first week sober. Jess took charge of her life and became a youth activist. She volunteered 30 hours a week in substance abuse programs and other community organizations.

Her senior year in high school, Jess was elected for Associated Student Body president. It would have been a victory for her, as if her dark ages had passed, but she hadn't counted on being harassed by a group of her peers.

Jess said the group would throw things at her house at night because they thought she was gay. She didn't want her mom to know about the turmoil she was going through, so she cleaned up the yard every morning.

"My mom woke up every morning at 5:30, so I stayed up all night," she said.

Luckily, Jess had the help of her now best friend who was a teacher at her high school. Exhausted from her sleepless, long nights, Jess retreated to her classroom at six every morning, where she slept until school started.

Her teacher was also gay, though she wouldn't admit it for a long time in fear of losing her job.

When Jess told her she was going to the beach one day, her teacher insisted on coming—partly to look out for her. She invited a straight teacher to come with them so no one would get the wrong idea.

In one day, it rained, snowed, hailed and then the sun came out.

"We were standing on the beach, and she said 'You know that question you refuse to ask? Well the answer is yes,'" Jess recalled. "And the only thing I said to her was 'Are you happy?' And she said 'Yes.' That was the end of the conversation."

After she graduated from high school, Jess considered her waist-length hair. She had grown it long to blend in with the rest of the girls in school.

"I felt like I didn't need to pretend anymore," Jess said.

She chopped her hair off, bleached it blonde and started new at Western. Jess had decided she was not going to be openly gay her freshman year, so she would have time to adjust. "I went to introduce



klipsun/annmarie coe

myself to my next-door neighbor, and the first thing she asked was 'So, do you have a girlfriend back home?' and my teeth about hit the floor," Jess said.

Yep, that was it; she wasn't hiding it any longer.

Jess decided to come out to her roommate. She was so nervous, she kept vomiting the day she planned to tell her. It was October 11th, 1996, National Coming Out Day.

"She was really cool about it," Jess said. "She was like 'Well, okay. I knew that, but okay; thanks for telling me.'"

The golf ball-sized stone smacked against the right side of Jess' head, inches from her temple. Her head was pounding from the impact as she scanned the hillside. She saw no one.

All she had heard was the stranger's voice yell, "Dyke!" just before he threw the stone at her.

Although the stranger retreated, the temper Jess had shelved away resurfaced. Everything she had learned to that point, every tear she had cried, every friend she had lost told her to pick up that stone.

She didn't know where the voice came from. She didn't know who's voice it was. Her fast-pitcher's arm instinctively grasped the stone in hand and flung it into the woods.

No one was there to witness the stranger's crime; he never developed into more than a cowardly shadow.

What happened next changed Jess' life.

Everything became a whirlwind of events. After reporting the hate crime to university police and meeting with university administration, she found there were no suitable procedures for students to report hate crimes. Although the crime was written in a police report, the fact that Jess' attacker called her a "dyke" was left out. If it were left in, it would have been considered a hate crime.



klipsun/annmarie coe

"A lot of times when something negative happens, people tend to focus more on the negative than the opportunity it presents," Jess said.

She began to work with administration to develop better reporting procedures of hate crimes at Western.

One of Jess' professors, Pat Fabiano said, Jess has dealt with what happened to her with great dignity. Fabiano teaches Health of a College Student at Western.

"She's raising the whole issue to a public level," Fabiano said. "Often times we judge the whole community on the behavior of a small group of people."

"What I saw after the incident was an outpour of concern for Jess as a person. The person who did this is not typical of Western."

Students stood in Red Square holding signs in a silent protest against hate crimes: "We do not accept this. Do you?"

More students marched from Memory Lane to Huxley College in support of awareness and education. Gay and straight students began to approach Jess and tell her they were very upset about what had happened.

"Speaking at Take Back the Night was really tough, because it was kind of putting myself out there," Jess said. "Which wasn't really what I was interested in doing; it's a community issue, not a Jess issue."

A student alliance was formed to educate and fight against hate crimes on campus. Jess began to realize the allies she was surrounded by were

not only gay—they were straight as well.

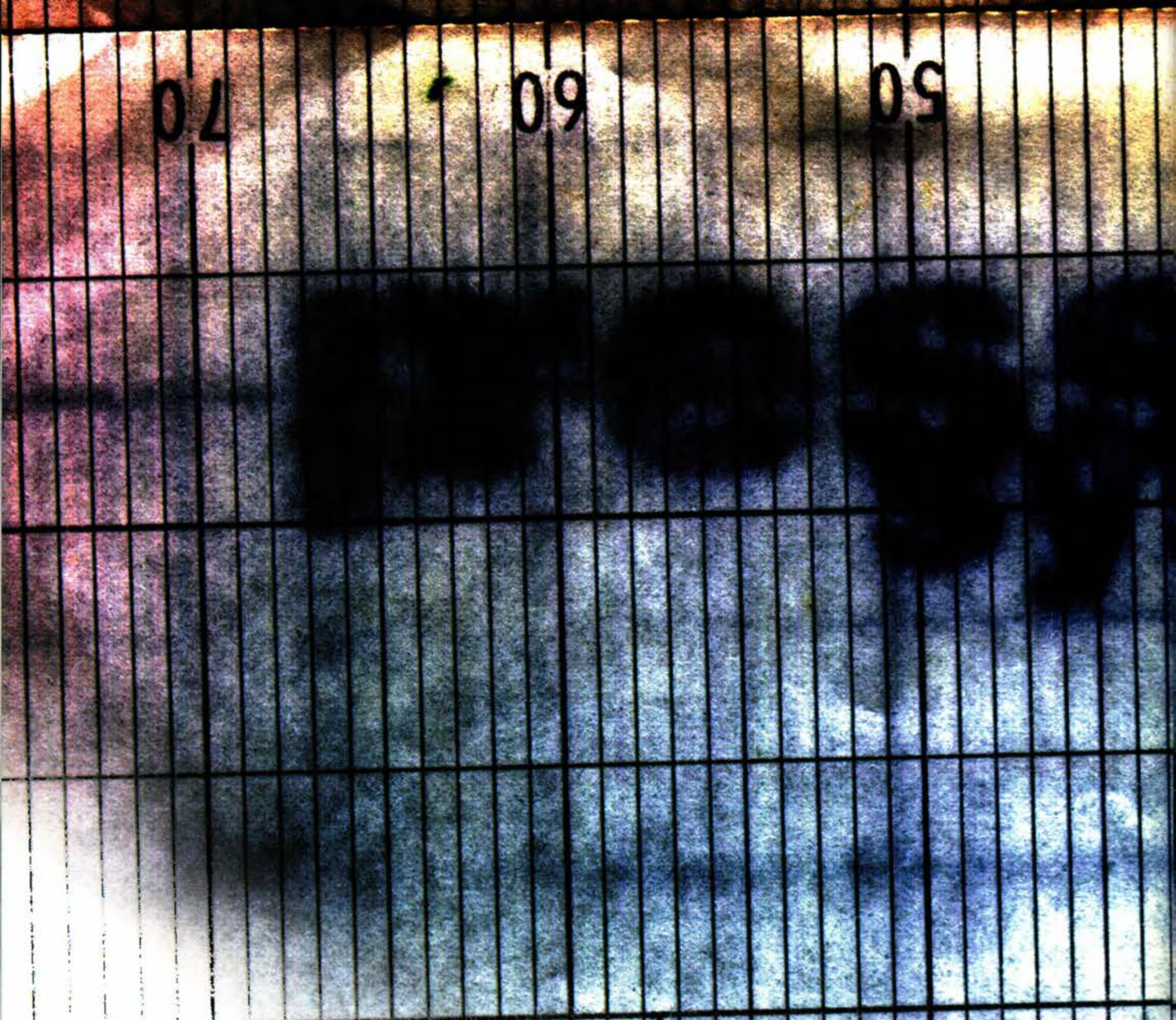
Jess had the community she had always wanted. It wasn't about having family or friends that loved her—she had always had that. What made this time in her life so significant, was that she lived in a community who didn't have to know her to sympathize with her; it didn't matter what she looked like, or who she kissed. No one deserves the mistreatment she had endured.

It has been six years since Jess read that article in Sassy magazine that said it was just a phase, and it would go away. Six years ago, Jess would never have guessed there would be gay celebrities, such as Ellen Degeneres and Melissa Etheridge, gracing the covers of Time and Newsweek magazines.

These covers line the walls of her bedroom, along with a gay pride flag, which drapes across the wall behind the television. Videotapes of the post-coming out episodes of "Ellen" fill her video cabinet.

"The place is a little gayed out," Jess said.

But her bedroom is a haven. It is the one place where disarray makes sense. Just as she has surrounded herself with the community of rainbow-colored stick figures that join hands in the decor of her bedroom, Jess has also surrounded herself with a community who embellishes the positive experiences around her, and who also lets her know that it's okay. **K**



The Elwha rumbles into docking position at Orcas Island, loaded to capacity with tourists, the lifeblood of the island's economy. Stragglers on the upper deck watch seagulls play in the blustery seawind. A colorful kite shop displays its wares just up the hill from the Orcas Landing.

Many of the tourists are headed toward the village of Eastsound, which caters to the tourists' needs by providing places to eat, sleep and ride rented motor scooters at \$15 per hour.

They brought extra money with them, and they want to spend it. That's one of the main reasons artist and sculptor Anthony Howe moved here 10 years ago—he wanted his art to be seen and, if possible, bought.

There's no way to miss the sculptures. Made of stainless steel, copper and ball bearings, they hang from the trees by the Horseshoe Highway, the only road into Eastsound. Twisting and twirling, they wave their metal arms at the tourists like robot barkers at a carnival; they beckon the curious up Howe's hilly driveway to the fabulous forest freak show.

At the top of the road is the field. Here, Howe strung thick suspension cables between Douglas fir trees and hung his art on his mettalic spider's web. The ocean inlet that gives Orcas Island its horseshoe shape allows a steady breeze to flow up through Eastsound and Howe's sculpture field. Some creak, others rotate slowly, silently, their shiny metal parts glistening in the sun.

One is like a spaceship, another is a jester's cap with legs. Dizzying DNA strands made of metal; a whirling copper Sufi dancer with no body, only arms. In the corner a giant blue pod stands on stilts. Roll it on its stationary pedestal and listen to six superballs clunk around inside, hitting a mishmash of drumheads, guitar strings and metal. A strange instrument in an eerie forest orchestra, it sounds like heavy-metal fairies.

The kinetic constructions are the result of 10 years of work for Howe, now 43. Ten years of hard work, starting at 2 a.m. every day.

"I can't sleep too long," Howe says, sitting down in a metal garden chair of his own creation. "I get depressed if I sleep too much. Plus, I like what I do." Working in the small hours of the morning allows him to be alone with his thoughts without threat of distraction. It's the time in the morning when there are no restraints on his concentration, he says.

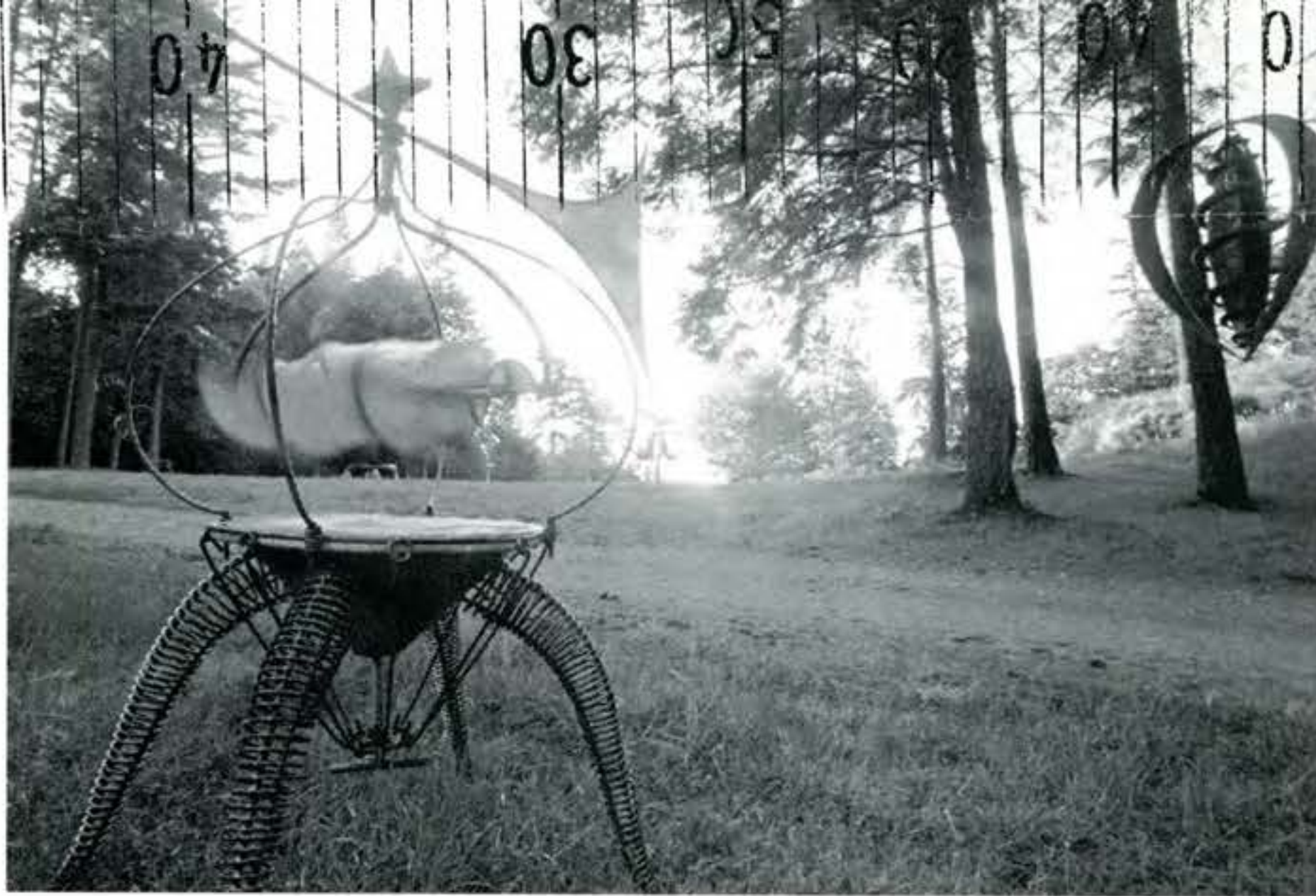
Howe's peculiar circadian rhythms don't lead to very many evening social engagements. Just when people are heading out to a nice dinner at La Famiglia, a local Italian restaurant, Howe is crawling between the sheets. Now it's 1 p.m., 11 hours since he's seen the outside of his workshop, and just about time for a nap.

Howe's movements are slow and his body seems thankful for the chance to sit down. He only moves his head when he speaks in his low East Coast-influenced baritone—the kind you might find on a late-night radio



low pressure system

story by al bentley
photography by ryan hooser



show lulling everyone to sleep. But the body he's about to send to bed is his own. He's tired, but Howe is ready to talk about the history of the motivation behind his work.

"At this point, everything is so automatic, and I've done it every day; I don't even think about (inspiration) anymore," he says. "But there was a time, when I first started doing this, especially after I started getting some of the shapes down—for about a year and a half, life was like a walking hallucination for me," Howe says with a reflective nod.

"I didn't dream these things; they weren't dreams," Howe says. "It was stuff that I could see in my mind—I was wide awake and I'd close my eyes and I'd see shapes and it was wild. I don't know where they came from; they weren't like anything I'd ever seen before—I had no control over it; it was just automatic."

These visions aren't uncommon for people to have, Howe says. Painters and other artists have also been known to have these kinds of ghostly visions.

"I still get a glimpse of it now and then," he adds, "but it'll probably never happen again. It did it for a year and a half—it was pretty weird. I was perpetually high from the stuff I was seeing."

None of the hallucinations were drug-induced, he says.

"If anything, anything I did to myself lessened the experience," he says. "If I wanted to heighten it, the best way would be to exercise and do yoga—that always made it more intense."

"Drinking or anything else like that just seems to obliterate it," he says, laughing.

Howe admits after several hundred pieces, his work isn't as romantically inspired as it used to be.

"(Before) it was more of a dream-inspired or subconsciously inspired piece versus a real conscious thought process," Howe says. "A lot of 'em at this point; I have a solid idea of what I want, like, 'I want more movement.' They're all kind of continuations of each other. They're not as romantically inspired as they used to be...but I still like making them."

Howe admits to having little formal education in the technologies he employs.

"Some people think I have this engineering background or something," Howe says. "I tell 'em it's really pretty straightforward. I don't know anything about physics—it's all common sense. It takes a lot more physics to understand how to work on a car engine than these things do—and you know I've learned a lot just from making one to the next."

Howe studied art at Cornell University and the Skohegan School of Sculpture and Painting, and though he never took a sculpture class in college, he considers the time he spent at Skohegan fundamental to in his passage from art student to professional. The days of watercolor painting are over now, though. His influences back then were artists Andrew Wyeth and Winslow Homer.

"I was a water colorist for 10 years until I was 30, and then I couldn't do it anymore—I hated painting. I had three shows in Boston, but I just didn't enjoy it," Howe remembers. "It was all rules, with every stroke pre-sized—it felt like I was falling into a bigger and bigger cave, a hole or trap."

"They had one of the coolest sculpture professors [at Skohegan], but I guess I just didn't have the confidence to take any of those classes," Howe says. "I did, however, spend most of my childhood building things. I built treehouses, boats, wind-sailers, did a couple of experiments with lawn hedgers, that kind of thing."

"I started making sculptures in New York. It just occurred to me one day to do it," he says.

Working in a warehouse in Manhattan, Howe taught himself to weld and work with metal. As he learned, he began to produce in three dimensions. He displayed his early work on the roof of his studio and later in New York City galleries.

When he moved to Seattle with his wife Lynne in 1994, he learned more metallurgical techniques from other metal workers in the area, particularly work with pounded copper.

A year later, looking for a spot to best display his work, the couple settled on Orcas Island, an hour away from Bellingham.

"We're able to sell them here," Howe explains simply.

"By the time [potential customers] get here and see the sculptures they are more open to something a little different," Howe says. "And because



they're on vacation, they usually have some extra money."

Howe admits to sometimes having trouble with his sculptures.

"Dozens of 'em don't work," Howe says, coming alive in his seat momentarily. "The easy part is banging out the shapes. The hard part is getting the bearings to fit, the bearings to work, getting the bearings so water doesn't get on them so they rust, getting them so if they're hit by a 50-mile-per-hour wind, they don't fall over; you know, I still have problems."

"I think that everything that moves—physical art, sculptures—they have life spans and need maintenance."

The equipment Howe uses provides a more directly physical problem.

"Making sculptures stresses your body pretty hard," Howe says. "I spent a couple of months in the winter just working on the computer [where Howe does a small percentage of his sales, through his website]. I needed a break. There's a lot of fumes and some of the tools I use have a lot of vibration to 'em, so they tend to hurt your nerves—the nerves in your body and wrists. I've had some bad problems with my wrists before. They're pretty good now, but it's always good to get away from anything — even if you love it — for a while. Winters up here get cold and damp, and it's hard to be in the shop."

The shop is an artist's dream — a large warehouse with a spacious studio, packed with welder's toys; stacks of sheet metal ready to be shaped; welding equipment and half-finished projects—lying on their sides or attached to the ceiling—litter the space.

On the other side of the warehouse is a mini-gallery/office, where Lynne handles the business side of things.

The materials he uses aren't a problem to find, Howe claims, but he laments the price of ball bearings, an integral part of his kinetic sculptures.

"Balls are hard to make," Howe explains, "and really, really precise ball bearings are harder to make, and they're just expensive—like, a ball bearing about this big (makes an okay sign with his hand) you go to an auto store and buy it, by itself, it'll cost you \$20 to \$30. But I found a place where I can buy them by the pound," he adds.

That Howe can sell his art in such an out-of-the-way part of the world is amazing, but this feat is made doubly so by the presence of his tourist-market-driven neighbors. But Howe doesn't mind the knick-knack attractions of Eastsound.

"Anything that anybody likes to do is fine," Howe says. "I would hate to denigrate anything anybody else does—for whatever reason they've gotten where they're at, doing what they're doing and there's always some reason for it, what they like, what they don't like. I'm glad they're here."

Howe's finds his work shaped the aesthetic goals he sets for himself.

"I'm just interested in getting as much movement as possible [in my art], and working with whatever new shape I'm interested in," Howe says. "I'm trying not to repeat, do the same thing over and over again; otherwise, they just get boring." **K**

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